

11.0 - Area-Specific Plans

11.1 - Introduction



The Master Plan provides a city-wide vision of how to direct and manage land use change in the

community. In some instances, a more detailed approach will be required to insure that appropriate consideration is given to character, design and detailed issues. Area-specific planning provides the opportunity to more closely examine a particular geographic area of the city and tailor appropriate recommendations that best suit the needs of area residents, businesses and property owners.



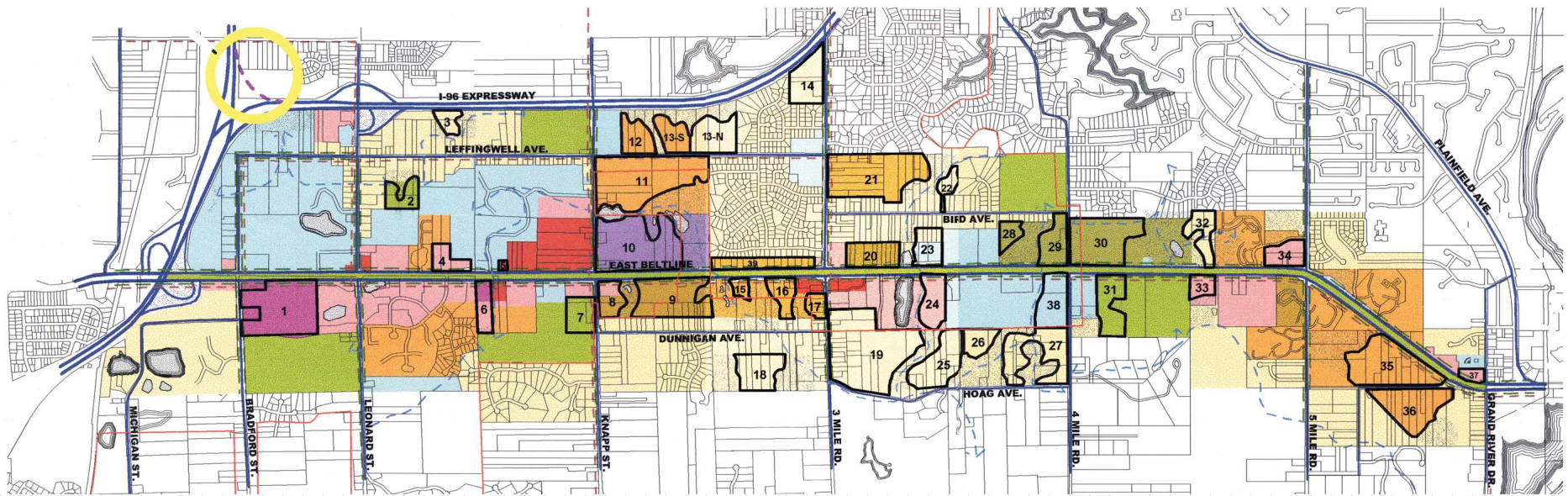


Figure 11.a - North East Beltline Future Land Use

LEGEND

Sidewalk	Water Body
Non-Motorized Path System	Water/Sewer Service Area Boundary
Planned On-Street Bikeway	Designated Development Area
Low Density Residential	Environmentally Sensitive Area
Medium Density Residential	Commercial
High Density Residential	Mixed Service
Park/Open Space	Mixed Use
Urban Agriculture	Office
	Institutional

11.2 - Purpose

Area-specific planning is an effective way to ensure that land use and development goals for a particular area of the city are identified to protect its unique character while encouraging reinvestment and revitalization. These plans provide a closer analysis of an area than a citywide master plan by establishing a specific mix of uses and building types, roadway alignments and design treatments, and necessary public facilities and amenities needed to make a neighborhood, mixed-use area or business district a success.

Formally, area-specific plans may be officially adopted into the city's Master Plan. Informally, they can serve as catalysts to organize neighborhoods, increase citizen technical skills and attract desired private sector investment. To be effective, area-specific planning efforts must be collaborative, involving residents, businesses, institutions, city representatives, property owners and/or developers. This collaborative planning approach will make it possible to craft detailed plans that balance varied interests, build on

the Master Plan's recommendations and enhance an area's viability and stability.

Area-specific planning will create significant benefits:

- implementation of the Master Plan;
- appropriate allocation of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding;
- coordination of Community Resource Team (CRT) activities as part of the city's Community Oriented Government (COG) initiative;
- prioritization of Transportation Enhancement project requests;
- the effective targeting of public investment within a given geographic area;
- strategic investment by community foundations and other non-profit organizations; and
- a strategic focus for neighborhood and business organizations.

11.3 - Planning Areas

Area-specific plans may be prepared for blocks, neighborhoods, business districts or larger areas. They may be undertaken in response to a development proposal or as a proactive planning study. In all cases, these plans should be developed as a complement to the Master Plan.

Area-specific planning is recommended for the city's neighborhoods - especially those in need of revitalization - and for the following areas as identified on the *Future Land Use Map* (Page 21):

- mixed-use areas;
- neighborhood, village and sub-regional centers; and
- traditional business area core and connectors.

In addition, planning may be required in areas where land use regulations are in place that fail to protect the character of an area or satisfy the objectives of the citywide Master Plan. It may also be needed where the Planning Commission has determined that due to the scale or impact of a proposed development additional analysis is required.

11.4 - Initiators and Partnerships

An area-specific planning process can be initiated by the Planning Commission (as described above), property owner(s), developer(s) in the pre-planning stages, community-based organization(s) and/or the Planning Department.

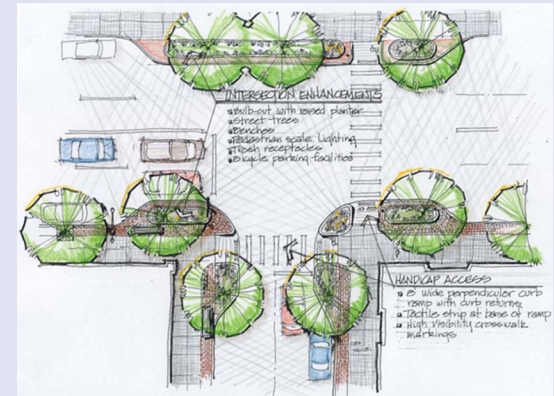
Partnerships should be actively sought with key stakeholders to gain insight, understand issues and anticipate challenges prior to a plan's development. Stakeholders may include residents, business owners, property owners, workers, institutions, elected

officials, city officials, neighborhood and business associations, non-profit organizations and other groups or individuals who are interested in the future of the area to be planned. These stakeholders should remain engaged throughout the planning process to ensure ownership of what is proposed in the plan recommendations, to assist with implementation and, ultimately, to realize the goals of the neighborhood or area plan. Community engagement in an area-specific planning process also contributes to the philosophy of this Master Plan by listening and responding to the community.

11.5 - Planning Process

A general approach to preparing a neighborhood or area-specific plan is provided below. No specific planning approach is mandated by state law; however, the following suggested process has proven itself over time to produce effective results. This approach may be modified based upon the purpose of the area-specific plan. Active public participation and stakeholder engagement throughout the entire planning process is an essential component of a successful planning process.

- **Collect Data** - Do research; collect and analyze information on the physical, social and economic characteristics of the study area.
- **Identify Problems and Opportunities** - Define key planning and urban design problems and opportunities.
- **Formulate Goals** - Define goals and translate them into objectives and priorities.
- **Preliminary Plan** - Formulate and evaluate plan alternatives to develop a preliminary plan.



Charrette Process

One technique that can be used to plan an area is called a charrette. A charrette is a highly interactive design process undertaken within a brief period of time by an inter-disciplinary team that generally includes community stakeholders, planners, landscape architects, engineers, and others involved in land development decisions. This process provides five distinct advantages as a planning tool.

1. This inclusive event encourages all project stakeholders to participate in the planning process and to act creatively within their areas of expertise.
2. All participants focus on the project's history, constraints and opportunities at the same time...everyone gets the same information.
3. Limited in time and scope, the charrette clearly and quickly defines relevant design and development issues, creates alternative solutions and graphically presents the project's final direction.
4. Participants are willing to implement the plan with a clear understanding of what is proposed and their roles as stakeholders.
5. Documentation of the planning process, issues, alternatives, stakeholder involvement and project recommendations is provided at the end of the process.

It is important that all appropriate entities are involved in the charrette process from the beginning. When individuals are involved at the inception of a project they are more likely to support the final recommendations.



Information Collection

Important information to collect concerning the built environment may include the data below.

- Existing land use
- Building condition
- Ownership
- Height and massing of buildings
- Historic/architecturally significant structures
- Size of parcels
- Setbacks from the street
- Placement of entrances and windows
- Walls and fences
- Parking area design and relationship to buildings
- Number of parking spaces, utilization, square feet of building space/number of dwelling units served
- Road widths, sidewalks, curb cuts, medians
- Pattern of streets/size of parcels
- Patterns of movement (e.g. pedestrian connections, access to transportation/transit)
- Street furniture (e.g. bus stops, street lights, signs)
- Landscaping materials, both planting and hardscape
- Public infrastructure (e.g. drainage facilities, bridges)
- Social interaction opportunities and activity centers
- Relationship between built and natural environment (e.g. sensitive environmental lands, valued natural features, where conflicts may occur)
- Architectural styles and traditions
- Infill opportunities

- **Refine Plan** - Review and refine the plan and approve the end product as the neighborhood/area-specific plan.
- **Implementation** - Present the plan to property owners, residents, business people and other key stakeholders located within the study area to verify consensus. A resolution of support from neighborhood and business associations is encouraged. Present the plan to the Planning Commission and City Commission for adoption. (Once adopted the plan should be used as a standard for gaining site plan approval.) Initiate implementation actions.
- **Continue Planning** - Monitor and evaluate progress. Update and revise the plan as needed.

11.6 - Area-Specific Plan Elements

An area-specific plan should attempt to achieve several goals in order to be considered for adoption as an amendment to the citywide Master Plan. These goals insure consistency with the policies and recommendations of the Master Plan and other City of Grand Rapids documents. Plans will:

- reference, and be consistent with, the recommendations of the citywide Master Plan;
- assign appropriate and reasonable land use classifications;
- promote compatibility with the existing character of an area;
- provide standards and design guidelines for land uses and development character consistent with the Master Plan;
- promote transit and walkability;

- designate pedestrian priority streets in coordination with the more detailed planning of the distribution of uses within the area and the *Street Classification Policy*;
- identify, if necessary, additional infrastructure improvements.

The following elements are recommended in an area-specific plan to achieve these goals. Additional elements may be included beyond this list, particularly if a neighborhood and/or business association has undertaken a planning effort. In many neighborhood plans additional social issues, traditionally not addressed by a land use plan, may be included. Therefore, portions of a plan rather than the complete document may be selected to amend the city's Master Plan. At a minimum, an area-specific plan should contain the following elements:

- neighborhood/area-specific boundaries;
- neighborhood/area-specific character description;
- purpose or intent of plan;
- description of planning process;
- list of stakeholders involved in the process;
- relationship to other plans, policies and regulations;
- strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis or other issue identification mechanism for the planning area;
- existing and future conditions, including but not limited to:
 - streets (layout, hierarchy)
 - structures (type, use, height, setback)
 - property (lot size, configuration)
 - parking (type, location and use)
 - landmarks/amenities;

- land use and design goals/objectives;
- plan recommendations and/or conceptual site plan (if for a small area) that includes proposed land use, infrastructure investments, desired design guidelines, etc.; and
- an action plan.

11.7 - Adopted Area-Specific Plans

A neighborhood or area-specific plan can only be implemented if appropriate decision-makers are aware of what the plan says. It is recommended that such plans serve as amendments to the citywide Master Plan. As an amendment to the Master Plan, the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission and the City Commission would formally adopt the area-specific plan. Upon adoption, it can then be used to justify decisions that are consistent with the plan's intent.

The following plans have been adopted as part of this Master Plan.

- North East Beltline Joint Development Plan (Adopted 1998)
- Street Classification Policy (Adopted 1996)
- Voices & Visions: Community Planning for Downtown (Adopted 1993)

These plans shall serve as complements to the Master Plan. The City of Grand Rapids Master Plan, adopted November 14, 2002 shall supersede an area-specific plan or other earlier city land use plans if an inconsistency exists. Every effort has been made to incorporate the recommendations of earlier area-specific plans (e.g. Northeast and Northwest area plans) into this Master Plan document.



Amending the Master Plan

Several steps must be undertaken for the Planning Commission and City Commission to adopt a neighborhood or area-specific plan as an amendment to the Master Plan. The Municipal Planning Act (285 of 1931, as amended) requires the following process to amend the city's Master Plan.

- The Planning Commission and City Commission shall be notified in writing of the intent to prepare an area-specific plan.
- Upon completion, the plan shall be submitted to the Planning Commission, who then shall submit the proposed plan to the City Commission for review and comment. The City Commission shall then approve the distribution of the proposed plan.
- The City Commission will direct the Planning Commission's secretary to submit a copy of the proposed plan for review and comment to:
 - the Planning Commissions or legislative bodies of each city, village or township located within or contiguous to the City of Grand Rapids;
 - neighborhood and business associations located within or contiguous to the planning area;
 - West Michigan Regional Planning Commission;
 - Kent County Board of Commissioners; and
- each public utility company and railroad company owning or operating a public utility or railroad that has registered its name and address for the purpose of receiving notification.
- Comments from the above listed entities may be submitted to the Planning Commission on the proposed plan within 40 days after the plan was submitted for review. A copy of the comments shall also be provided to the Kent County Board of Commissioners.
- Not less than 55 days or more than 75 days after the release date of the plan, the Kent County Board of Commissioners shall provide comments on the plan to the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission. Comments shall include, but not be limited to, a statement of whether the plan is consistent with plans of adjoining communities and/or is consistent with any county plans.
- The Planning Commission will hold at least one (1) public hearing on the proposed plan, which shall be held once the comment period has closed.
- Public notice shall be provided not less than 15 days before the hearing by 1 publication in a newspaper. All entities that were offered the opportunity for comment shall also be notified.
- The plan must be approved by 2/3 of the members of the Planning Commission.
- Following approval of the proposed plan by the Planning Commission, the Secretary of the Planning Commission shall submit a copy of the proposed plan to the City Commission.
- Unless the City Commission asserts its right to approve or reject the plan, the Planning Commission adoption shall be the final step for the plan.
- If the City Commission chooses to reject the plan, the Planning Commission shall consider the City Commission's objections and revise the proposed plan to address those objections.

Note: Revisions to the plan are the responsibility of the Planning Commission; however, it is recommended that any changes be made in conjunction with the entity that initiated the neighborhood or area-specific plan.

